ACADEMIC SKILLS & LEARNING CENTRE

RESEARCH ESSAY WRITING
The Academic Skills and Learning Centre (ASLC) provides individual consultations for all graduates, which means you can submit drafts of your essays (also reports, or any other sort of writing) for review and feedback. Drafts of over 3000 words need to be into the ASLC two days beforehand; shorter drafts by 12pm the day before.

While we can help you with many aspects of textual production, we do not provide an editing service—that is, fix grammar. The ASLC can also assist you with other challenges you are experiencing, for example, with researching, reading, notetaking, referencing, oral presentations, and so forth. If you need further information about ASLC services for graduate coursework students, go to: https://academicskills.anu.edu.au/

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Sections of this booklet (marked **) include material taken directly or adapted from Gail Craswell’s Writing for Academic Success: A Postgraduate Guide (London: Sage Publications, 2005).

Unless otherwise stated, images in the booklet are from morgueFile, a site that provides free image reference materials. For more information, go to: www.morguefile.com.
INTRODUCTION

The Academic Skills and Learning Centre (ASLC) has provided courses on research essay writing for graduate coursework students for well over ten years now. Over time, the way the course has been run has changed significantly with the growth of the graduate coursework student population and our need to accommodate students as best we could. Where once we ran the course as a series of seven workshops over 3-4 weeks, this practice soon proved unviable—many could not attend all workshops because of timetabling clashes. We eventually moved to a full-day course, offering Saturday courses as well for those who could not make it during the week. And this is the way it is today.

There were several reasons for introducing such a course. First up, such essays were one of the major forms of assessment across disciplines. There was also the complex make-up of the graduate coursework student population:

• Some of you will be returning to graduate study after a long time out in the work force. Even where you might once have had refined essay writing skills from your undergraduate degrees, these may now be rusty. We have heard this from many students.
• Many of you are international students, and you may not have studied in Western universities before, and/or be familiar with writing essays at a graduate level.
• Some of you will be transferring disciplines. This could mean that you are transferring from an undergraduate discipline in which you never wrote essays, to a graduate study discipline in which essay writing is required. This was the case, for example, with a student who had done an undergraduate degree in science and enrolled in a postgraduate degree in international law. Thinking and writing science is very different from thinking and writing law. The same is true for other situations of transfer (e.g. transferring from undergraduate linguistics to postgraduate anthropology).

A third reason was that you all undergo assessment early in your courses and will have little time once these start to work on writing skills. You need something upfront before you become too busy. For the above reasons, we think of the research essay writing course as primarily a Refresher course, with an accompanying booklet that contains more detail.

Over the years of working with so many graduate coursework students across disciplines on their essays in individual consultations, which the ASLC provides, we have learnt a great deal about the type of challenges graduate coursework students experience in writing research essays. The course has been designed around this learning, as has this complimentary booklet.

The booklet: Part 1 covers Preparing the ground. To write a good essay, you need to: understand what the discourse of academic argument is all about; interpret the topic correctly; know how to read strategically; gather the best, the most focussed information (including critical information) from your sources; work out what your position is going to be on topic while reading; gather sound evidence to support your ideas; and recognise the flaws in reasoning that can weaken argument. Part 2 covers Writing the essay. Equally, you need to know how to: focus, develop and link paragraphs to ensure structural soundness and coherent argument development; write a solid introduction and conclusion; ensure adequate signposting and smooth integration of source material into your essay; use correct referencing styles in-text and on the reference list; and address other important aspects of academic style and practice.

We hope you find this booklet useful as a handy addition to the course. We advise that you dip in and out of the booklet as the need arises, depending on the stage of the process of essay production at which you are, and what you would like more detail on.

Dr Gail Craswell and Dr Stephen Milnes
ASLC graduate advisers
SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF PROCESSES INVOLVED IN WRITING A RESEARCH ESSAY

1. ANALYSE AND DEFINE THE TOPIC or QUESTION
   • Analyse the topic or question if it is already set—what EXACTLY is the lecturer asking you to do?
   • If answering a set question, use the Subject-Angle-Process method of analysis, as outlined later in the booklet.
   • If writing on a general topic, consider making it into a question as a specific question is easier to research and write on than a general topic.

2. IDENTIFY KEY THEMES AND IDEAS
   • Look at course outlines, lecture notes, and seminar readings to identify key themes of the course.
   • Use brainstorming or mind-mapping techniques to identify key ideas.

3. SEARCH THE LITERATURE
   • Based on the topic and the brainstorming session, identify some KEYWORDS with which to search library catalogues, abstracts and databases for material. Is there a specific academic database for your area? Students studying Australian literature, for example, would most likely use “AustLit” — http://www.austlit.edu.au — in order to conduct initial research into their topic. If there is no specific database, try “Google Scholar” rather than simply using “Google” to find research material.
   • Pay particular attention to journals in the general field—skim back issues.
   • Cover the key writers in the field—how can you identify these?
   • Ask your lecturer/tutor to recommend articles, books if needs be.

4. READ AND NOTETAKE
   • Initially, it may be useful to go over the seminar/recommended readings on the topic or set question before looking at the materials discovered during independent research.
   • Read to obtain an overview of what people are writing on the topic: Where are the debates within this topic? What are the key issues of these debates? Are there any key theorists writing on the topic? What evidence is being used to justify each position or interpretation of the topic?
   • Take careful notes as you read.

5. FORMULATE YOUR ARGUMENT IN RELATION TO THE TOPIC
   • Try to express your argument or position in one clear sentence, e.g. “This paper argues . . .”
   • The argument requires supporting evidence and ideas, and sound reasoning.
   • Next, consider what you need to do to persuade the reader of your position. Will you need to define key terms, compare and contrast, critically evaluate the literature, provide background context, analyse a case study, and so on? Brainstorming and mindmapping can help you get a better sense of what needs to be done to support your argument and what topics need to be covered.
6. DEVELOP THE PRELIMINARY OUTLINE OF THE ESSAY

- The first division of your topic into parts represents your view of what is important in these debates. This is your preliminary analysis.
- Keeping the required length of the essay in mind, transfer key ideas and supporting ideas from the brainstorm session to a linear structure (outline). This outline is the bare bones of the essay.
- Prepare a more detailed outline—with a section and sub-section plan.
- Expand or contract the outline to suit the length required—add or delete main points, supporting points, the evidence you will use to explain and support them, potential responses to counterarguments or challenges to your position.
- Remember: You may need to read more in order to flesh out your ideas.

7. WRITE THE FIRST DRAFT (for yourself)

- The purpose of this draft is to work out what you think about the topic in relation to what you have read.
- Try to write it all in one go: BODY, CONCLUSION then INTRODUCTION last? Which order do you prefer and why?

8. DO SOME MORE FOCUSED READING

- Identify where you need more information. Often in the process of writing a first draft you can develop ideas that require more research or you may identify areas that require more supporting evidence.
- Widen/extend/narrow your literature search for more material.
- Find examples to support your main points.

9. TAKE A BREAK

- Put some critical distance and time between yourself and your work. Doing this will allow you to reflect critically and objectively on what you have written.

10. REVISE FIRST DRAFT, DO SECOND DRAFT (for your reader)

- Give this draft to someone else for comments and feedback, for example, a friend, your partner, a fellow student, or an ASLC adviser. Take note of their comments.

11. EDIT

- Use the ‘Basic editing checklist’ at the end of this booklet, which addresses a range of academic style and practice matters, for editing the final draft.

12. HAND IT IN AND REWARD YOURSELF!!

- Go to a movie
- Eat out
- Spend the day watching television
- Buy a CD
- Relax
- Go swimming
- Head off to Sydney
PART 1: PREPARING THE GROUND

THE ESSAY AS FORMAL ARGUMENT AND KEY EXPECTATIONS

A research essay is a type of writing called ARGUMENT, which is our primary concern throughout this course. Argument is an APPEAL TO REASON. In a nutshell, the discourse of argument involves:

• Taking a position on a specific topic (sometimes the position is referred to as a ‘thesis’, or a ‘point of view’);
• using quality ideas* to develop your position in the body of your essay;
• using quality evidence to support development of your ideas;
• using quality reasoning in the process of developing your ideas; and
• developing your ideas into a coherent line of argument.

Your position captures the argument you intend to develop in the body of your essay. It is NOT a matter of whether your argument is right or wrong, true or false, but how strong it is (the exception here is the use of ‘formal proofs’ in argument as, for example, with mathematical proofs). A strong argument is a high quality argument.

* Note the reference to ‘ideas’ as opposed to ‘opinions’, which do not need to have supporting evidence as we all know from our everyday conversations with friends! Lecturers are not actually interested in your opinions, even though they may say: ‘I want to know what you think—what you opinion is’—they really want your ideas.

WHAT LECTURERS’ EXPECT

Some years back the ASLC conducted a study of lecturers/tutors’ comments on students’ essays in order to determine what basic criteria they applied in assessing essays, and came up with the following. The essay:

• Will be clearly focused on the set topic and deal fully with its central concerns.
• Will be the result of wide and critical reading.
• Will present a reasoned argument.
• Will be competently presented.¹

These four criteria underpin the discussions of essay writing throughout this booklet.

THE GRADING SYSTEM AND ITS MEANING
(ADAPTED FROM A DEPARTMENTAL COURSE GUIDE)

Please note that this is a generic system, which means it gives a general idea of some of the criteria that may be applied. It is not a system used by any particular ANU department. Check your course outline for information on how your essays will be assessed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE (letter)</th>
<th>INTERPRETATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Distinction (HD) 80-100%</td>
<td>Work of exceptional quality showing clear understanding of subject matter and close appreciation of issues; well formulated; arguments sustained by evidence; tables and diagrams where appropriate; relevant sources referenced; marked evidence of creative ability and originality; high level of intellectual work; critical evaluations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinction (D) 70-79%</td>
<td>Work of unusual quality showing strong grasp of subject matter and appreciation of dominant issues, though not necessarily of the finer points; arguments clearly developed; relevant sources cited; evidence of critical evaluation; solid intellectual work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit (C) 60-69%</td>
<td>Work of solid quality showing competent understanding of subject matter and appreciation of main issues, though possibly some lapses and inadequacies; arguments clearly developed and supported by sources, though possibly with minor loose ends and irrelevancies; some evidence of creative ability and critical evaluation; well prepared and presented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass (P) 50-59%</td>
<td>Range from a bare pass to a safe pass. Adequate, but lacking breadth and depth. Work generally has gaps. Probably takes a more factual approach and does not attempt to question or interpret findings and evidence. May end in a summary and not an argued conclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail (F) Below 50%</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory. This grade characterises work that shows a lack of understanding of the topic. No evidence of analysis. Often irrelevant or incomplete.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: The grade reflects the quality of the paper, not the quality of the person)

If you believe you need more information about why you have been given a particular grade, discuss it with the marker. Carefully check departmental policy with respect to resubmission of assignments/essays, if you feel a need to go down this path.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE SHORT ESSAY**

Short essays, say of from 600-1500 words, are not usually too demanding in terms of argument, but they are demanding to write well. Short essays put enormous pressure on you in terms of what to select for discussion in your essay while still answering the question. First, check with your lecturer:

1. Whether or not you are expected to deal with the topic precisely as set; or
2. Whether it is permissible to narrow the topic in some way (e.g. address topic concerns in the context of a particular country, event or situation, or focus in greater depth on some aspect of the topic).

In the case of 1, it is likely that a broad topic has been designed to test what you extract, from a range of possibilities, as particularly significant to discuss. By significant I mean what you consider most important to discuss, what you choose to focus on and why. Having identified what you want to cover in the essay, then think about:

- Main ideas you want to bring forward in relation to the different topics to be covered;
- the best order in which to arrange these ideas;
- evidence you will need to support and develop these ideas; and
- building paragraphs around these ideas (some ideas might take several paragraphs to develop).

Perhaps you will do the above after writing a first, rough draft.
Another widespread expectation is that the essay will stay within the designated word length. If the essay needs to be cut to meet word length, do not cut the very detail that strengthens argument. Rather, consider these possibilities:

- Introductions are often wordy, over-written, and can stand considerable condensing.
- Lengthy arguments or discussions can fall victim to what is sometimes called ‘the expository bulge,’ meaning that there is an unnecessary blow out of explanatory information. You need only as much detailed explanation as is necessary to secure the argument.
- It is often possible to cut material from the more descriptive or expository parts of the essay (e.g. historical background) that need to be there, but can be condensed, as in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Cutting to meet word length (Source: G. Craswell, Writing for Academic Success: A Postgraduate Guide. London: Sage Publications, 2005).
SETTING UP A TOPIC AND TOPIC ANALYSIS

Generating your own topic

It is challenging to set up a topic that is appropriate for both length of essay and time available to produce the essay. Some criteria you might want to apply when setting up your own topic are:

- Genuine interest
- Word length
- Time available for research and writing
- Relating design of topic to COURSE objectives—think about the issues/questions being raised in lectures/tutorials around the subject area.
- Scope of literature on the topic—problems can arise if there is too much or too little. Too much will leave you struggling to cover the topic and so prevent you from offering any interesting insights; too little could mean that you will have insufficient material on which to base a strong argument.
- Broad versus a more focused topic. A more focused topic will allow you to engage in in-depth analysis.
- Building a topic around a single major issue (as in the example below) or around a set of issues.

You need to engage in critical evaluation in order to develop an argument. Remember:

An ISSUE is a topic that sparks controversy within a community of speakers, readers, and writers. More specifically, an issue is a topic that creates a tension in the community.

Subject area: EDUCATION **

Central research question: To what extent should tertiary students pay for their own education?

Major issue: ‘USER PAYS’

Key questions associated with this issue:

- Should all students be expected to pay fully for the cost of their higher education—why? why not?
- Should some students and not others be expected to pay fully for their higher education costs—why? why not?
- Should all students be expected to contribute in part to their higher education costs—why? why not?
- Should this contribution be indexed? If yes, on what bases should it be indexed? (socio-economic grouping? cost of producing courses? or what?). What are the reasons for your view?
- Should other organizations be expected to contribute to costs of higher education—why? why not? If yes, which organisations should contribute? (public/private? government? industry? business? other?).
- What criteria might apply in determining which organisations should contribute and under what circumstances? To what extent should these organisations contribute, in full or in part—why? why not?
- What evidence can be brought to bear on the position you wish to take on topic?

As a final point: **Be sure to get your topic approved by your lecturer/tutor—write it out in full.** Review these set topics for 3000-word essays that were given out in different graduate areas. Consider:

- The focus of these topics. Why might they have been considered appropriate for length? The way in which lecturers' direct students to take account of theory/concepts that are obviously relevant to the particular courses being undertaken (you will need to consider this aspect too in designing your topic); and
- the tendency of lecturers' to draw on a 'controversial' quotation from the literature (in inverted commas) as a topic-setting agenda. Topics are usually designed by lecturers to plunge you into controversy. (You too might want to select this type of quotation around which to organise your own topic, but make sure that it is a quotation subject to debate in the literature).

“Critical theory possesses a vision of international relations which, when articulated more fully, can give direction to the field as a whole.” Discuss this claim, bearing in mind the contrary view of many post-structuralist theorists.

Discuss the extent to which Australian macro-economic policy is driven by political necessity rather than economic circumstances: Refer to the political business cycle literature and recent Australian federal elections.

“Philosophically, it [the common law] has had the greatest difficulty in inventing public law ideas.” Discuss, referring to the concept of the Rule of Law and using one or two specific examples.

Compare and contrast ‘greetings formulae’ of one English speaking country (e.g. Australia) and a non-English speaking country of your choice (e.g. Japan). Take full account of the cross-cultural linguistics literature in your analysis.

**ANALYSING A SET TOPIC (THE SAP METHOD)**

Most essay topics are designed to force you to engage the issues as you read and evaluate different points of view presented in the literature. So you will need to bear this in mind as you go through the following steps with your own topic. This sample topic from a graduate student essay is used to illustrate how to go about analysing your topic:

**Topic**
If the arms control enterprise is a child of the Cold War, what use is it now? Should it give way to more radical disarmament efforts or is the arms control disarmament enterprise now irrelevant? Discuss in relation to relevant theory.

**Step 1: What am I being asked to investigate?**
It is necessary to identify the true subject matter. In the case of this topic, it is simple: ‘arms control.' But it can be more difficult identifying precisely what you are supposed to be investigating. If you are uncertain about what you are supposed to be doing, clarify this with your lecturer **before going to your reading.** You do need to be absolutely certain.

**Step 2: Why am I being asked to investigate this subject matter?**
This question requires careful BRAINSTORMING or MINDMAPPING to ensure that you will deal fully with the central concerns of the topic, all of them. You also need to do it before you start identifying relevant sources and reading them.

Brainstorm your topic to generate a set of questions that can guide you in both identifying the most useful sources to read and gathering the best information. This set of questions is very basic; a student in the discipline of the sample topic could produce a more refined set:
What is meant by arms control? Does it need to be defined or not? (Definitely yes—if there is no settled agreement on its meaning in your discipline). Is arms control a child of the Cold War—yes or no? (This is not a very important part of the topic). What does the ‘disarmament enterprise’ consist in? Do you know precisely what is meant by this phrase? To what extent does arms control remain relevant? (A lot, reasonably so, only minimally or what?) In what precise ways does it remain relevant, or not? (Identify sound reasons to support your views, and be sure to identify the ISSUES, the points debated by scholars). Are there security measures other than arms control that need to be taken into account post cold war? What are these? Evaluate and ask yourself as you read the literature: Ask yourself: What is my position on all this?

Information providing answers to questions of this type would need to be gathered to deal effectively with this topic, and to skim read. By skim reading (see ‘Strategies for skim reading’ below), you should be able to avoid wasting time on reading material not useful to answering your topic, and so cover more of the relevant reading to ensure that your essay ‘will be the result of wide and critical reading.’

If you are visually inclined, to help focus your reading, you might want to try mapping the topic beforehand as in figure 2—put the central topic question in the middle (use more than one map if there is more than one central question in the topic):

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**Figure 2: Mapping the topic** (Image in its original context on the page: http://www.sfu.ca/.../2004-09 839 Outline.html)
Step 3: How should I approach the topic?

Have you been given instructions about how to go about answering the topic? Yes, in the sample topic: ‘Discuss in relation to relevant theory’. This means that whatever else you do, you must engage the relevant theory in reading for, and writing your essay.

‘Discuss’ is a commonly used directional word but there are also other words and phrases, for example:

- Explore the following comment.
- Analyse . . .
- Examine carefully the suggestion that . . .
- Evaluate this claim. (at the end of a topic)
- To what extent . . .?
- Critically review . . .
- Compare and contrast . . .
- Do you agree? (at the end of a topic)

Directions of this type always imply ARGUE. Engage the issues, and develop your own position using sound evidence as support.

Reading for Argument Development

The term 'position' can be defined as follows:

A position is the point of view that has been arrived at in relation to a given topic on completion of critically assessing the relevant literature. Another way to think about it is as the thesis (as in argument) to be developed in the body of the essay.

Accessing Quality & Relevant Sources

Ensuring quality sources

Start with the following:

- General reference papers (take some care as these can sometimes be a reflection of the author’s viewpoint—i.e. they are not always neutral).
- Quality print and electronic sources, including journals (check academic credentials if necessary).
- Avoid the search engine Google (you are likely to suffer from both information overload and a lot of material not directly relevant to your topic).
- Use Google Scholar—means of accessing scholarly material around a subject matter.
- Use database searching (check out Graduate Information Literacy courses if you are not sure how to go about this). This is the best way to locate directly relevant material.

Ensuring relevant sources

Consider these points:

- Brainstorm the topic BEFORE GOING TO THE READING (i.e. follow the exercise suggested under Step 2, ‘Analysing a set topic’, above)
- Learn to read strategically by skimming
STRATEGIES FOR SKIM READING

First, consider these questions preparatory to skimming:

- In setting your own topic or project, have you defined your goals/aims/objectives and scope clearly enough to actually begin, or refine, information gathering?
- In addressing a topic set by the lecturer, have you brainstormed the topic to ensure you will deal fully with the central concerns of the topic—all of them?
- Will the information you are gathering allow you to answer the goals of your topic?
- Remember when skimming: To recognize, for example, that an author is talking about economic recession in the USA in a specific period is not enough; you need to know precisely what the focus is—the effects (immediate/long-term?) of the recession, the causes of the recession, the impact on other countries, or what. What is your focus in terms of the topic?

Step 1
When reading a large document (e.g. a book):

- First review the table of contents, then read the introduction intensively (word for word) to find out the author’s goals.
- Now skim the chapters and sub-divisions to identify which sections/pages might serve your information needs. Note these, but continue with skimming until you have covered the entire document. If there is an index, this too is useful to browse in at this point.
- Read the conclusion intensively to clarify the author’s findings.
- Check the Index (if there is one) formatters of particular interest to you.

Step 2
With a shorter document (e.g. a journal article):

- Read the abstract (if there is one) and the introduction intensively to determine the author’s objectives, issues to be addressed or arguments to be presented.
- Now begin to skim the text. Read sub-division headings, main ideas in paragraphs so as to identify the subjects under discussion—what the author is talking about. Do try to identify the precise subject being covered.

Step 3
Continue reading through the entire text, marking as you go any parts, sections, pages, etc. that seem directly relevant to your information needs.

Step 4
Now return to those areas you have marked and read them intensively in order to take notes.
To address the demands of the essay question you need to engage critically with your sources, that is, to read with a purpose and to read actively. An active reader is someone who, when reading the literature, assesses the claims being made by the author, probes the author’s assumptions, and situates the author’s text in relation to their argument or to their developing argument. An active reader interrogates the text by questioning all that the author says and does. Active readers exercise their full set of thinking skills as set out in Figure 3:

Some useful points to follow during the process of reading are set out below. Remember your objective when reading is to come up with the position you want to take on topic:

- Keep an open mind. Maintain a healthy scepticism—probe for biases, problems, etc. (think carefully about theory, methodology, modelling—all can skew scholars’ interpretations; any problems with the study design—tests, experiments, questionnaires, interviews, etc.?)
- Identify key debates and issues. Raise questions as you read—lots of them: What are the key issues? To what extent do scholars agree/disagree and why? How strong are their arguments? How good is their evidence? Why/why not? What do you think and why?
- Make a glossary of terminology. Use specialist dictionaries/reference works—examine terms and concepts—definitional clarity is vitally important in all academic communication—any problems in this regard?
- Don’t just highlight. Annotate texts: note your queries, uncertainties, challenges, ideas as they occur to you—jot these down in the margin. This ensures you are really critically engaging with the text.
- Map authors’ different viewpoints. Draw mind maps, graphs, whatever suits you to plot the relatedness of information. You might want to try something like the argument map in Figure 4:
Finally, always ask yourself: What do I think and why—BUILD YOUR POSITION.

**ACTIVE NOTE-TAKING**

A reader engaging critically with the text will of course make notes. To take notes efficiently, keep your purpose in mind—keep asking yourself, “Why am I reading?” What precisely am I looking for and why?” Note-taking can help you to:

- concentrate on what you are reading;
- gather and evaluate information;
- form links between the different texts that you have read;
- identify relevant quotations to draw conclusions; and
- summarise ideas and arguments.³

If you do copy a quotation, copy it exactly (words, punctuation, etc.) and record the page number. See the later section: ‘Referencing: General Principles.’

As already noted, be wary of merely underlining or highlighting a text. Active note-takers annotate the text, using various techniques to do so. To add to those suggested above, you could:

- Underline important terms;
- circle definitions and meanings;
- write key words and definitions in the margin;
- signal where important information can be found with key words or symbols in the margin;
- write short summaries in the margin at the end of sub-units;
- write the questions in the margin next to the section where the answer is found; and
- indicate steps in a process by using numbers in the margin.⁴

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There is no one method for taking and storing your notes. Some students use a notebook, others use index cards. Some store notes on the computer or in the software program Endnote. When taking notes, you need to collect:

- Complete bibliographic information (author, date, title, place of publication, publisher, edition, pages, etc.); and
- Content information, and your response to the content information. Your purpose will help you make decisions about the content material that you need to note.

At the end of the note-taking process, review your notes.

If you are answering a specific question, before reading it can be useful to think about the information or content you need to gather and then devise a note-taking template that allows you to organise information into relevant categories. For example:

For the question "What have been the main historical trends and problems in Australia’s economic relations with Japan since the early 1930s?,” it can be useful to organise your notes under relevant subheadings; in this instance, “Economic relations: trends” and “Economic relations: problems.”

**CRITICALLY EVALUATING THEORY**

If theory does feature in your writing, you will need to critically engage with it. Reading and critically evaluating theory, or philosophical works applied in analysis, can be particularly challenging, as can the critique of models or methodologies. It could be that your course includes much new theory so that you do not feel you have a sound knowledge base from which to exercise your critical judgement. Or you may be unpractised in critiquing theory having never before done this in an academic context.

The term ‘theory’ is often used loosely in the academic community. The meaning followed here is: “The formulation of abstract knowledge or speculative thought; systematic conception of something” (New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). In other words, ‘theory’ can be understood as a clearly identifiable, abstract body of knowledge, one that has been conceived systematically.

Theories are abstract systems in which certain aspects (the key ideas or principles of a theory) are privileged by an author/s over other possibilities. Theorists abstract from the chaotic, actual world of everyday events and activities, what they consider most significant to explain that world, or some aspect of it.

Theories are useful for their explanatory value, and perhaps their predictive value. They can open up different possibilities in ways of perceiving and understanding complex events and happenings important in your context of academic enquiry, and so prove to be valuable tools of analysis. But they do have their limitations.

You will need to critically evaluate how well the particular theory does in fact explain what it sets out to explain—its strengths and weaknesses. Critiques by other scholars or schools of scholars, and those of your lecturers, can provide a sound starting point for your own critical evaluation of a particular body of theory. Before conducting your critical assessment, however, you will first need to know what the theory is really all about, not always easy in itself.

All established disciplines have specialist dictionaries or reference works. Making use of these is a useful orientation strategy before you read more deeply and comprehensively in the theoretical literature.

As you read, probe the assumptions about the nature of the world that underpin the key ideas or principles of the body of theory you are studying. Think about whether these assumptions are biased or not (see Figure 5). Cultural bias, for example, would be evident if the assumptions underlying a theory of human behaviour proved to be strongly Western-centric and not inclusive of all cultures.

**BUILDING A POSITION AS YOU READ**

A ‘position’ can be defined as follows:

> The position is the point of view arrived at in relation to a given topic on completion of critically assessing the relevant literature. The position you take on a topic captures your thesis as an argument.

As you are building your position through the process of reading, think about these questions:

- Does the position you are leaning towards address all parts of the topic?
- Are you likely to adopt a unified position, or is the argument you what to develop such that the position you take on topic is likely to have several parts to it?

Following is an example where the writer

- lays out the parts of the argument, and
- indicates the essay’s structure in the process.

(This was a single paragraph taken from a graduate student’s essay introduction that has been broken up for ease of reading):

> This essay adopts the following structure in discussing the proposition. First, the notions of both general price level and specific price changes will be clarified in the context of today's economic environment. It will be argued that both types of price changes are a necessary feature of the economic environment under which accounting operates and should therefore be considered in evaluating the usefulness of accounting information.

> Next, the development of accounting thought regarding financial reports in general, and the statement of financial position in particular will be traced. The essay will use this discussion to show that the rationale underlying the use of historical costs for the balance sheet is no longer as compelling in an environment where significant price changes occur.

> Finally, the question of whether it is necessary to incorporate the effects of changes in general price levels and specific asset prices will be discussed separately, and then jointly. A case will be made for reporting both types of changes in the balance sheet, after careful consideration of the relevant theoretical and empirical research on these matters.

> This essay concludes with the view that accounting for the effects of price changes is indeed essential in deriving a statement of financial position that fulfils the expanded role of accounting in today's world.

(This concluding sentence captures the overall position as it is developed through the parts laid out above)

- Are there any good ideas you want to bring forward in developing your position into an argument (jot these down as you read)?
- What evidence can you use to support development of your ideas (take notes on this as you read)?

Again if you are visually inclined, you might want to try mapping debates within your discipline to help you decide on a position—think about where you stand and why. To do this, you could draw on the examples of argument maps in Figures 6 and 3:  

Refer to a specialist dictionary or reference work in your discipline to gain an initial overview of a theory or unfamiliar terms/concepts.
EVIDENCE AND REASONING

Think about the different types of evidence you might use, as for example:

- Raw data you have gathered (e.g. tests, experiments, surveys, interviews, etc.). You are only likely to be doing this when writing a very long essay or sub-thesis.
- Material from sources you are reading (scholarly articles/books etc.; organizational sources—e.g. government, business, industry reports and other publications.
- Statistical data
- Literary, art works
- Legislation/policy documents
- What else in your discipline?

Of course, arguing from sources usually constitutes your main source of evidence. But:

- Don’t just describe what others have said.
- Use source material to advance your argument just as this graduate student does in the following example:

Moreover, certain specific policies of British colonialism made it difficult for the various ethnic groups to integrate. One key policy in maintaining communalism was the colonial education policy. Prior to 1952, there was no national system of education in Malaya. Rather, the British policy on education for the three main ethnic communities “ranged from token paternalism (toward the Malay peasantry) to
complete neglect (of the Chinese); the Tamil laborers were presumed not to require any education at all.* [reference provided]. Such policies divided rather than united.

Sometimes you might need to neutralize an opposing argument that threatens your own, as in this example where the writer is arguing FOR the cost-effectiveness of ‘centralization’:

X [reference] offers sound reasons for the continuing centralisation of services in terms of the economic benefits to government. However, he does not take account of the high costs of maintaining centralisation when determining these benefits.

(Shows that there is a flaw in the argument: it is too NARROW)

**SUPPORTING A POSITION: USING QUOTATIONS FROM SOURCES**

In the process of developing your argument, you will often use the evidence, documentary material, and interpretations of others to support your position. As a researcher, you have to demonstrate control of this material. If the material begins to control you, then the quality of your argument and interpretation will suffer. “The point of research writing,” Fowler and Aaron note, “is to investigate and go beyond sources, to interpret them and use them to support your own independent ideas.”

If you find a concise quotation that is relevant to the point that you are making:

- Make sure that you copy the original source accurately, that is, exactly as it appears in the original (even if there are spelling mistakes in the original, do not correct them—rather, place [sic] in square brackets beside the mistake).
- Make sure that the quotation is smoothly integrated into your essay, that is, correctly and appropriately punctuated. “Your main text and the quotation should be grammatically consistent. This sometimes requires that you add or remove words. If you find it necessary to omit unnecessary words, use three full stops . . ., known as ellipsis, to show that you have deleted words from the original text. If you need to add words, put those you have added within square [not round] brackets. Make sure you do not change the original meaning of the text through your omission or addition.”

For a research essay, there is no magic number of sources that you must use. Lecturers and tutors “give some weight to the number and range of references you have used for your work in order to ensure that you have established the soundness of your case by considering evidence from a broad range of possible sources.” When providing this coverage, you need to be aware of contending arguments and the origin and potential bias of any source. Finally, don’t over-use quotations, particularly not long ones where it is often more appropriate to paraphrase.

**WRITING STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN ARGUMENT**

For your argument to be reasonable, you will need to include sufficient detail to secure it, and you can do this by way of a variety of strategies for developing paragraphs. The following examples have been taken from a selection of graduate student essays:

- Look closely at the **nature of the detail** in the following paragraphs and the effects achieved by the different strategies used to secure the argument through paragraph development.
- Consider too the **process of reasoning** in these paragraphs: Does the reasoning seem sound to you? Note as well how the writers draw on their sources to advance their arguments.

**DEFINITION** is used to develop this paragraph, which is a good example of providing a working definition from the literature in an essay introduction. The writer defines “public law” by comparing it with constitutional law, and strengthens his definition by drawing support from scholars in his discipline:

Constitutional law is concerned with the ways in which public power is institutionally organised and applied, with the relations between the institutions which exercise public power, and with the

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7 Hay, Bochner, and Dungey, Making the Grade, 70.
relations between these institutions and other social interests [reference provided]. Public law is a more ambiguous term that refers to the principles governing disputes between the State and its subjects as determined by the courts [reference provided]. It has been argued [reference provided] that public law has come to include administrative law, criminal law and even environmental law depending on how the State is conceptualised as a legal actor. For the purposes of this essay, if government action can be defined as the regulation of individual liberty, public law can be defined as the regulation of the government’s ability to regulate individual liberty. [Further explanatory information was included in a footnote].

COMPARISON is favoured below to demonstrate the difficulties of determining the origins of rugs from their representation in paintings. Note the use of COMPARATIVE ILLUSTRATION at the end, where the writer picks up on details mentioned in the first sentence [references provided] to strengthen her position:

In trying to identify the origin of a rug, we can use as guiding principles the elements of design, the decorative style and patterning, colours and their combinations, as well as known geographical connections [references provided]. It may also be possible to physically examine the rug itself—the thickness of the warp and the weft, the types of dyes used, the techniques of application, and so forth. With a rug in a painting, however, these tools of analysis are either unavailable or less reliable. The medium of painting is an illusion of reality, even if it pretends to be a depiction of the fine details of reality. The rug plays a part in that illusion, and is likely to be shaped by the artist to fit the desired overall composition. A rug in a painting may have its pattern altered by the angle of perspective, or a fold in the material may distort the appearance of the pattern; the colours may have been changed for artistic effect, as might the ornamental design and other features.

CAUSAL ANALYSIS characterises the development of the next paragraph. Note how the writer develops his general assertion in the first sentence (the topic sentence) by analysing the causes of technological development in Japan, and strengthens his analysis by drawing on scholarly support.

Technological development is not a natural process. Social forces lie behind the development of any given technology. In Japan’s case, “economic and technological development have been enshrined as Japanese social goals since the Meiji restoration of 1868” [reference provided]. It has even been suggested that the “military class, the samurai, [were] by their own life experience . . . able to recognise the benefits and ‘rationality’ of Western technology” [reference provided]. Be that as it may, the more immediate forces leading to the development of microelectronics and IT in Japan derived from the changes and crises facing Japanese capitalism from the late 1960s onwards [explanatory footnote added]. These included a recognisable slow down in economic growth, and demographic changes causing labour shortages, followed by more recent concerns with an aging population.

RESTATEMENT means saying the same thing in a different way, but it is not merely repetition, which is a problem in writing. Restatement is a useful strategy to clarify your difficult ideas and/or reinforce their importance. Restatement is sometimes signalled by such phrases as ‘That is . . . ’, ‘By this I mean . . . ’, ‘In other words . . . ’, and often by nothing at all. In the following example, ideas in the restatement, the material emphasised, are much the same as those expressed in sentence 2. The restatement both clarifies the writer’s initial statement on orthodox historians, and strengthens it by drawing support from the literature. Comparison is again a favoured method of developing the paragraph as the writer distinguishes the approach of orthodox historians and that of the more radical scholar X:

X’s approach to history is considered radical by orthodox historians. Conventional historiographers presuppose that history is a record of ‘facts’ that, with careful investigation, can be objectively verified. As Y argues, “orthodox historians adhere to a ‘discovery’ view of the past, holding that the past is there, a field of real entities and forces waiting for the historians to find” [reference provided]. They also view history as a linear sequence of events that is characterised by continuity. X, however, takes an ‘archaeological’ approach. He is concerned with the discontinuity of events, with “analogies and differences, hierarchies, complementarities, coincidences, and shifts” [reference provided], with uncovering the discontinuities themselves in the interstices of time. [emphasis added]
SPECIFICATION means saying precisely what is meant by a more abstract phrase; in this case, “the great reform measures.” Failure to specify can weaken your argument because there is no way for a reader to tell if you know what you are talking about, as would occur if specification were omitted below:

The great reform measures—the reorganisation of parliament, the revision of the penal code and the poor laws, the restrictions placed on child labour, and other industrial reforms—were important factors in establishing English society on a more democratic basis. (emphasis added)

QUALIFICATION is needed in this example, which highlights the problem of using generalizations in argument, something you need to watch:

The racist attitudes of opponents of increased immigration are a concern. It is poor argument because of oversimplification. The writer implies that all opponents of increased immigration have “racist attitudes”, which would be impossible to establish, though this may be true of some opponents. Even then, such "attitudes" cannot be assumed. There would need to be detailed evidence as support, perhaps extracted from the language and rhetoric used by some opponents in their publications or in excerpts from their public speeches.

Evidence is vitally important, but it is not sufficient in itself to ensure strong argument. There also needs to be sound reasoning.

AVOIDING FAULTY REASONING**

Solid evidence is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for strong argument. There needs to be good reasoning when you write your essay of the type noted in Figure 7. For reasoning to be sound, it is also necessary to avoid fallacies of the following type (and many others), which signal incorrect or faulty reasoning.

- **Circular reasoning or arguing in a circle:** For example: ‘Penal reform is necessary because of prison corruption, which shows the need for prison reform.’

- **It does not follow:** This means that the conclusion does not follow from the premises of the argument that have been set up. This problem can sometimes be seen over longer stretches of writing where the writer draws a conclusion that is at odds with points made in the preceding argument.

- **Black and white thinking:** In this case, the tendency is to go from one extreme to another. For example: ‘If teachers cannot fix the problems in schools they should stay out of the debate altogether.’ That fact that teachers cannot ‘fix’ the problem does not mean that cannot contribute significantly to the debate.

- **Assuming that what is true of the part is true of the whole (or vice versa):** For example, assuming that alcohol is a big problem among 13-16 year old school students when this age group has been surveyed in only a small sampling of schools.

- **Begging the question:** This occurs by asking a question that wrongly assumes something to be true. For example: ‘Why are men more aggressive than women?’ You must prove that men are more aggressive than women, not assume that this is so.

- **Assuming the conclusion:** For example: ‘This action is wrong because it is immoral.’ You must prove that the action is wrong because it is opposed to moral principles not assume that this is so.

- **Appealing to an unsuitable authority:** This will occur if you draw on an authority who is a recognized expert in one field, but is not an authority in the subject matter you are discussing.
OVERALL STRUCTURE

To gain control of structure, use initially the excellent tools of brainstorming/mind mapping, which allow you to creatively plumb the depths of your understanding of the literature you have read—to dredge up all sorts of information and ideas that lie beyond the rational mind.

BRAINSTORMING/MIND MAPPING**

A brainstorming plan can take any shape you wish. Regardless, the idea is to initially brainstorm coverage so as to work out what you need to cover in your essay, to identify issues and to generate ideas that you want to develop. Jot down quickly anything at all that springs to mind. It does not matter how disorganized or messy your brainstorming plan is, just let your imagination float free. Get as much information in your plan as possible, and ignore structural issues at this point. You can use different coloured highlighter pens for different purposes.

To give you an idea if you have not used this method before, Figure 8 shows a simple plan, though yours could look quite different (and it won’t look so neat if you are doing it freehand) depending on your research interests, visual inclination and imagination:

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This initial plan could be developed into a more complicated mind map in which you chart a host of connections relating to the development of your essay’s argument. No longer will you be solely interested in what you want to cover, but also in why you want to cover that, how you will develop your discussion, and what you want to show or demonstrate—your argument.

From your brainstorming or mind-mapping, prioritise the main things you will do; for example, define key terms, provide background context, compare and contrast Case Study 1 with Case Study 2, examine the critical literature, and so on.

When you have a sense of what you are going to do to support your position, you can then use this information to plan or sequence the overall structure of the essay, particularly the main divisions. In other words, you can now produce a Contents outline, perhaps something along the lines of the following two examples:

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Example: two essay outlines

ARGUMENT
Define X
Evaluate 2 issues – focus on political, economic and cultural implications
Examine positive and negative implications of X (2 themes)
Conclude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan 1</th>
<th>Plan 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Section 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define term X</td>
<td>Define term X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neo-liberal</td>
<td>Various viewpoints</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leftist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Section 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Section 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluate Issue A</td>
<td>Politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Issue A</td>
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<td>Economics</td>
<td>Issue B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Economics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluate Issue B</td>
<td>Issue A</td>
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<td>Politics</td>
<td>Issue B</td>
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<td>Economics</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Positives</td>
<td>Positives</td>
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<td>Negatives</td>
<td>Negatives</td>
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<td>Theme 2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Negatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WRITING AN INTRODUCTION

First impressions matter. The introduction is an important part of the essay because it is where you show that you understand what the question is about, where you introduce the reader to your argument and where you outline how you intend to respond to the question.

It should:

• Demonstrate your understanding of the set topic, that is, what you think the question is asking you to do.
• Provide a clear statement of your argument (e.g. ‘This essay argues . . . ’).
• Orient your reader to the structure of your argument, i.e. your main points, how you establish your response, and the ideas and arguments to be developed. Be explicit in terms of signposting your argument. To do this, use verbs (e.g. “This essay argues. . . It commences with a brief history . . . and then analyses in turn three strategies . . . The essay concludes with an assessment of the three strategies . . . ”).
• Define any necessary terms, concepts, events or methods.

It should not:

• Merely repeat the terms of the topic.
• Give too much general background—just enough to introduce the general area and the issue, problem, or controversy.
• Announce your intention to write an essay (‘this essay will answer the question posed. . . ’).
• Talk about your difficulty in coming to terms with the topic (unless there are legitimate academic reasons for doing so).

You may find it useful to think of an introduction as being constructed according to ‘4 moves’ (these are not mandatory)8:

• Move 1: Introduce the field/context
  What is the field/context in which you are writing? Why is the topic important or interesting?
• Move 2: Indicate previous research/what is currently understood
  What is the current understanding of the topic?
• Move 3: Prepare for present essay/research
  What is the issue/problem/controversy needing resolution?
• Move 4: Introduce the present research
  What is your approach and line of argument with respect to the topic?

In general

• No one length or format of introduction suits all essays. Length varies according to the word limit and the amount that has to be introduced.
• A key quotation may be used, but immediately draw out its significance in terms of your argument, i.e. the reader must understand how/why you are using it.
• Most writers feel that they need to revise their introduction several times until it exactly reflects their argument and what they have discussed. Some write it first, others wait to see what they have written. Either way, it is probably not possible to have a really finished version until after the essay is written; after all, it is introducing the essay and so you need to know what it is introducing.

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8 The modelling of these moves in the context of essay writing is adapted from: John Swales, Genre Analysis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.141.
**COMPILING AN INTRODUCTION**

As the introduction serves only to orient your reader to your discussion, keep it short and to the point, something in the order of a page or so for a 3000-word essay. Short it may be, but the introduction does have an important function.

**Establishing the context:**

Provide relevant background information to establish the context of your discussion. Note this sample from the introduction to a research essay; it does not stray from the central concerns of the topic (i.e. the sample topic used in the earlier discussion: 'Analysing a set topic'):

The Cold War and nuclear age were born at about the same time. Seen strictly in this context, the Cold War merely added the nuclear dimension to the arms control enterprise. However, the concern about the devastating nature of nuclear weapons resulted in the greatest media emphasis being placed on nuclear arms control efforts, particularly on the arms race between the two nuclear hegemons, the US and the USSR [reference provided]. Nevertheless, in the same Cold War Period, much effort was put into conventional arms control such as Mutual Balance Force Reduction (MBFR) [reference provided], and areas of chemical and biological weapons as well as confidence building measures (CBMs).

**Defining important terms, phrases or concepts:**

If there is no settled agreement on the meaning of a word, term, phrase or concept appearing in your essay topic, acknowledge this, find the common factor, and give a working definition for your essay. Referring to a specialist dictionary or reference work in your discipline is a useful starting point. You can then build a working definition from other scholars' attempts at definition (see the example above under 'Writing strategies to strengthen argument').

Definition may, however, be a much larger task in an essay, and one not able to be satisfactorily addressed in the introduction. This was the case with the following set question, where how the term 'democracy' is defined becomes a core part of the argument being developed:

**Topic:** To what extent do the newly industrialized economies of the Southeast Asian region demonstrate a shift to democratic principles of government? Discuss in reference to at least two specific countries. Include in your discussion a review of current debates and theories of democracy.

**Laying out a position on topic:**

Provide a summary statement of the argument you intend to develop in the body of your essay—take care to address all aspects of the topic. If the topic has several parts, then your position should reflect this. Although the topic may appear to be straightforward, topics are rarely so. Consequently, the position taken will often be complex with several parts (see Box below).

Rather than lay out a position, you may be expected to state the main conclusions reached in your essay. Or rather than state a position (although it is a good idea to do so), or detail your main conclusions, you will provide a statement of purposes, as this writer did after establishing context by way of a brief review of a major debate in the literature:

The main purpose of this essay as to provide a critical evaluation of the different positions as outlined above. It could be that you find yourself making several of the above moves in your introduction.

**Making a procedural statement:**

Orient your reader to the structure of your essay, the way in which you intend to generally organize your discussion. Phrases signalling procedure may be of this type:

Initially, I examine . . . This is followed by a review of . . . A discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of X is then presented. The fourth section provides a comparative analysis of . . . Finally, I draw out recommendations for . . .
In many cases though, the procedure is indicated in a more subtle way, as in the hypothetical example given in the box below.

**An introduction should fulfil its reader-orientation function while being tightly focussed on the topic**

**Topic:**
‘Economic rationalist policies are responsible for the declining economy. Discuss.

**Factors identified as important from the reading:**
Policy making areas: (car manufacturing, technology, primary exports—foodstuffs)
Industrial action (national transport and miners strikes)
Natural disaster: widespread flooding
Factors in the international political economy

**Steps in compiling the introduction:**

1. Provision of background information relevant to the topic (three paragraphs of summary comments (with references) on the economy's decline over the period of interest).
2. Definition from the literature of what ‘economic rationalist’ means.
3. Laying out the position and procedure in a single move as follows (the four-part ordering of the position as expressed below reflected the overall structure of the essay):
   - (1st part) Economic rationalist policies of the present government have had a slow-growth effect on three major export industries: car manufacturing, technology and primary exports. Such policies do not, however, account fully for the evident economic decline.
   - (2nd part) Industrial strife during the past two years has been particularly disruptive to growth in some sectors.
   - (3rd part) The economy has also had to contend with extensive flooding in parts of the country.
   - (4th part) As well, there have been specific developments in the world political economy, which need to be addressed in discussing reasons for the economic decline.

**STRUCTURE AND SIGNPOSTING**

**Using sub-headings to divide up your texts**

Sub-headings, which are commonly used to divide up texts, are an important structuring device that, used properly, can help you avoid full rewrites because of structuring problems. Sub-headings:

- Help you to clarify the overall structure or organisation of your writing.
- Assist the reader to follow your line of discussion/argument.

Some areas prefer to use different fonts to indicate sub-headings, others numbering (e.g. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3). Also, the extent to which sub-headings are used tends to vary, with some areas approving greater frequency, and others insisting on substantial discussion following a sub-heading. Regardless of such differences, sub-headings cannot perform the hard work of structuring—only you can.

There should be substantial discussion following a sub-heading. Some writers though, tend to use sub-headings as a substitute for careful structuring, and so display an excessive reliance on them. A striking example of this was a 3000-word essay in which there were 16 sub-headings. The separate bits of discussion were disconnected, and the overall composition of the essay very fragmented. As there appeared to be no underlying logic in the selection and arrangement of sub-headings, it was impossible to identify a coherent line of argument throughout the essay. In other words, the sub-headings were distracting rather than helpful to a reader. Overuse of sub-headings can interfere with the coherent flow of text, and, in so doing, obscure a clear line of argument.

Try also to **make sure the sub-heading is useful, not merely decorative.** In many situations of writing, sub-headings are so general as to be useless; they give no indication of what precisely the writer will be focussing on.
To illustrate, where the topic of ‘development schemes’ is only one of many topics being covered in, say, a research essay on environmental degradation, it is not helpful to use this sub-heading: Development Schemes. In such a case, you would need to ask yourself: What is my interest in development schemes as regards environmental degradation? Why am I discussing these schemes at all? Indicate the connection between environmental degradation, your primary focus, and development schemes. Try for a more precise sub-heading of the type illustrated: increased pesticide usage in development schemes. The reader now knows precisely where your interest lies: increased pesticide usage in development schemes. The problem of increased pesticide usage is in fact part of the argument being developed.

However, if you were undertaking a lengthy discussion (perhaps as a substantial part of a long research essay or sub-thesis) of the topic ‘development schemes’, then you might begin with a general subheading: Development schemes, before breaking this down further, as illustrated below:

Development Schemes

1.1 The variety and nature of existing schemes
1.2 The effects of government policy on implementation
1.3 The issue of ‘local’ knowledge
1.4 Improving overall effectiveness

THE PARAGRAPH AND ARGUMENT DEVELOPMENT

The paragraph is the basic unit of structure in academic writing. The features that determine the organization of the paragraph are similar to those of the whole essay, that is, a signal to the content, logical development, and an ending. In short, the paragraph plays a fundamental role in developing and supporting your argument.

The paragraph should have:

• A main or unifying idea that often takes the form of a topic sentence—usually the first sentence. The topic sentence sets up the expectations about the focus of the paragraph that will be developed. The topic sentence plays an important role in orienting the reader to the main point.

• Sentences that support and develop the main idea in the remainder of the paragraph, where each is connected to the others to allow a flow of ideas. These sentences usually provide supporting material such as statistics, quotations, critics’ perspectives, or other documentary evidence.

• Coherent development signalled by transitions or linking phrases, i.e. words such as moreover, nevertheless, for instance, in addition, and consequently. Transitions show the reader how a sentence is related to the sentence that precedes it. In other words, linking phrases signpost your argument, the direction you wish to take. Do not, however, use transitions at the start of each supporting sentence. Transitions can either appear at various points in the sentence or not at all. As Sylvan Barnet suggests:

• The point is not that transitions must be explicit, but that the argument must proceed clearly. The gist of a paragraph might run thus: “Speaking broadly, there were in the Renaissance two comic traditions . . . The first . . . The second . . . The chief difference . . . But both traditions . . .”

• A logical end (allowing the reader to move on to the next paragraph).

PARAGRAPH LENGTH

“The paragraph is a unit of ideas, not a unit of length. The relative length of a paragraph is determined by the complexity and importance of the paragraph’s main point.” However, if a paragraph consists of one or two sentences, it may not be able to effectively develop an idea or provide enough evidence to support the main idea. Small paragraphs can create the impression that the argument is fragmented and inadequately developed. Conversely, long paragraphs may contain too many main ideas. It is sometimes a useful strategy to plan your

work around paragraphs of a similar length (e.g. 100-200 words). If you are writing a 1500-word essay, you can write 8-15 paragraphs. Similarly, if you are writing a 3000-word essay, you may write 15-30 paragraphs.

THE ROLE OF TOPIC SENTENCES

The topic sentence usually
- signposts the main or unifying idea/issue/theme of the entire paragraph,
- sets up expectations about the focus of the paragraph that will be developed, and
- orients the reader to the main point.

In the context of your essay, paragraphs need to be sequenced in a logical or appropriate way. By looking only at the topic sentences, you can see how you have ordered your ideas. When analysing your argument by looking at the order of the topic sentences, ask yourself the following questions: Is this the most appropriate sequence? Are the main ideas obvious? Have I directed the reader to the main point(s) or aspect(s) of my argument?

Let us look at two sections of an article by John Linantud. In this article, Linantud examines the decline in violence in Filipino Elections, discusses the role factions play in election violence, and argues that “church participation is necessary for democratic consolidation because it institutionalises non-violent, mass participation.” In example 1, Linantud intends to show that traditional political factors responsible for violence have not changed and therefore cannot be used to explain the decline in election violence. In this section, under the sub-heading ‘Explaining Factional Election Violence: Political Culture,’ Linantud uses topic sentences to develop his main ideas. In example 2, where he argues that the church is necessary to further democracy in the Philippines, he uses topic sentences to progress that argument.

Example 1: Explaining Factional Election Violence: Political Culture (pp.307-10, seven paragraphs).

Former President Fidel Ramos once decried a “culture of violence surrounding elections”. [reference provided]  
Introduces main concept: violent political culture

The first and most comprehensive element of this subculture is amoral familism —norms that justify any act to assist or protect the family. [reference provided]  
Examines first aspect of culture: amoral familism

The second manifestation of the subculture is the cultivation and reward of reputation.  
Explains second aspect—effective signposting

The third manifestation of the subculture is an exaggerated sensitivity to insult, or culture of honour, that yields a willingness to break laws or use violence to retaliate against perceived slights.  
Signposts the third aspect

Marcos exemplified this confrontational subculture.  
Uses political figure to show how three aspects are interconnected

Ultimately, however, a macho subculture is not a sufficient explanation for violence; few incidents disturbed the early martial law regime, because there were few national elections.

How can this subculture be changed?

Example 2: Explaining the Decline of Factional Election Violence: Church (pp.312-15, eight paragraphs).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The unprecedented high profile of the church dates to authoritarianism.</th>
<th>Provides background context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Though it attracts public criticism and internal divisions over policy critiques and candidate endorsements, the church maintains a strong consensus to promote peaceful elections and human rights to bolster democracy and empower the poor.</td>
<td>Explains first part of argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For information and mass mobilization, the church exploits a nationwide intelligence and communications network based in local parishes.</td>
<td>Elaborates on argument: develops another point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The church clearly believes that its moral authority, status, and reputation for neutrality will protect its workers, especially since ‘people power’ gave it a legitimate and positive public identity.</td>
<td>Demonstrates wide and critical reading before introducing key part of argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Though critics have questioned the church’s public voice, and to a lesser extent the efficiency and neutrality of Namfrel’s quick count, [reference provided] the multifaceted church effort is the biggest change in elections since the 1960s, and must share responsibility for safer elections with the military.</td>
<td>Answers the question in favour of the church—develops their position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of the two is more effective in reducing violence, the church or the military?</td>
<td>Further elaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the military is now less likely to become embroiled in partisan violence, the church is more important for democratic consolidation. | Poses a question, one that is related to the development of argument

Lastly, the church is the country's strongest unambiguously pro-democracy institution. | Sums up and reinforces argument

**TRANSITIONS: STRUCTURING & DEVELOPING AN ARGUMENT**

In your essay, each paragraph develops a main part of your argument. Following the topic sentence, other sentences develop the main idea. These sentences do this by providing supporting material, for example, statistics, quotations, critical perspectives, government reports, or other documentary material. However, when providing supporting material it is necessary to develop a logical flow or establish a coherent relationship between the different documentary material and your argument. Transitions or linking phrases make this possible. Transitions usually

- signal the links between sentences;
- signpost the logical and coherent development of your argument;
- appear at the start of a sentence, but can also appear at various points in the sentence.

Review transition words in the examples below:

**Example 1: Explaining Factional Election Violence: Political Culture (p.308).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic sentence</th>
<th>The third manifestation of the subculture is an exaggerated sensitivity to insult, or culture of honour, that yields a willingness to break laws or use violence to retaliate against perceived slights. Explained one official in 1998: “When you run for a certain position, it is your honour which is on the line . . . some politicians do it the wrong way” [reference provided]. The mixing of private and public honour raises the possibility of personal affront at criticism, failing bargaining, victory celebration, partisan rhetoric, and private and public gestures. It also drives illegal assistance to kin or friends, up to and including violence, to avoid the shame of failing a friend in need (fn). Lastly, the ideal-type culture of honour permits just two forms of expression: silence and rage. Silence is the fear of provoking confrontation through insult; rage is the need for revenge. Neither is compatible for frank discussion or institution building. Turmoil, however, makes a reputation for honour a self-defence mechanism. Cattle rustlers, for instance, hesitate to defy a local mayor if that mayor is willing to utilize violence to enforce the law. The same holds for political opponents.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporting evidence—quotation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signposts more examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signposts by repeating key nouns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example 2: Explaining the Decline of Fractional Election Violence: Church (pp.314–15).

| Topic sentence | Although the military is now less likely to become embroiled in partisan violence, the church is more important for democratic consolidation. First, it injects new, no-violent energies rather than suppresses old, violent ones. Secondly, church-led education and poll-watching institutionalize the participation of a less pliable and more educated electorate that could, under improving economic conditions, empower non-traditional candidates and reject vote selling and fraud. Both would decrease violence. Thirdly, improved election order would reduce demand for the ‘macho’ politician, and forge a less confrontational political subculture. A genuine culture shift, however, requires at least a generation to take effect, since it depends on the maturation of cohorts socialized into orderly elections (fn). Taken together, these developments could separate political order from social disorder, as in the United States. |
| Signposts example |
| Signposts each stage of the logical development of the argument |
| Sums up the implications of argument |

Take care in using the technique of First(ly), Second(ly), Third(ly), Fourth(ly). It is fine in the above paragraph, but can prove a problem over longer stretches of writing because readers will have forgotten what you are talking about by the time they get to the fourth strategy on the third page of writing. Linking phrases of this type would be better:

- One strategy involved. . .
- Another strategy. . .
- A third strategy brought into effect because of spiralling costs was. . . (reminding the reader of what you are discussing)
- Finally, senior management found it necessary to. . .

STRATEGIES FOR LINKING PARAGRAPHS**

Linking is often subtle and sophisticated in writing. Linking may even be unnecessary as, for example, in a methods section, where logic inheres in detailing the sequence of steps taken. Or you may be mapping the structure in the process of writing (very common), as illustrated below by this initial sentence of a paragraph:

Because of mounting costs, a set of radical strategies was introduced to speed up production. (About three pages of writing on the radical strategies — four in all.)

Try to use a range of linking or transition strategies rather than rely on a standard few.

Repeating words/phrases: One of the simplest, most common and subtle transitions is the repeated word, phrase or idea:

Last sentence of a paragraph:

(a) The nature of the ceremonial rites performed at this initiation ceremony is particularly important.
First sentence of the next paragraph:
These rites are organized around three basic activities, each with its own religious significance.

Last sentence of a paragraph:
(b) Here X postulates two general linguistic notions: The notion of polarities and the notion of equivalence.

First sentence of the next paragraph:
The notion of polarities derives from X's insight concerning...

The question-and-answer transition

Last sentence of a paragraph:
Why did the plan fail?

First sentence of next paragraph:
X, in his analysis, suggests three major reasons.

Use the rhetorical question with caution, as clumsy overuse tends to produce a forced stylistic effect—two or three times in an essay is enough.

The summarising transition

This writer has just completed a lengthy comparison of high school and university teaching methods. He now wants to move to a new, but related, topic of ‘personal responsibility’ in learning:

First sentence of the next paragraph:
Because of these differences in teaching methods, universities throw more responsibility on the student.

He makes transition by using a summary phrase, ‘differences in teaching methods,’ to refer to the lengthy discussion he has just finished.

The summarising transition may take even briefer form, with pronouns like this, that, these, or such being used to sum up a topic discussed in the preceding paragraph/s. Such pronouns though, like all English pronouns (‘it’ can be a real problem), carry with them the danger of the unclear referent. It is not altogether clear in the following example whether ‘these’ refers back to the ‘incoherent policies’ or the ‘tight fiscal arrangements’:

Last sentence of a paragraph:
The different institutions have produced incoherent policies in terms of the tight fiscal arrangements proposed on introducing the scheme in 1992.

First sentence of the next paragraph:
These have been the subject of vigorous debate in the literature.

This problem is easily overcome by naming the referent: ‘these policies’ or ‘these fiscal arrangements’.

Using logical connectives

Paragraphs can also be linked by words showing logical relationship: therefore, however, but, consequently, thus, even so, conversely, nevertheless, moreover, in addition, and many more. Usually though, logical connectives are used to move from one sentence to the next within paragraphs, that is, as internal paragraph transitions; such connectives typify argument development.

To illustrate, say a writer has just completed a paragraph summarising an author's analysis of a documented riot and now wants to move the discussion along:

Last sentence of a paragraph:
Brown’s analysis provides useful insights into the existing power relations between the army and the government at that time.

Possible first sentences of the next paragraph using three different logical connectives:

However, the power relations embedded in the social structure may be more important in explaining the causes of the riot.

Even so, there is no real attempt to grapple with the issue of the government’s role in the army’s attack.

If English pronouns give you trouble, name the referent rather than let a pronoun stand alone.
on unarmed men, women and children.

**Consequently,** Smith’s much quoted analysis of this same event needs to be reconsidered as it fails to take account of such relations.

Whatever its form, an inter-paragraph transition should be unobtrusive, shifting readers easily from one topic to the next.

**WORDS AND PHRASES FOR DEVELOPING DISCUSSIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To list, or show ‘time’ relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First/second/ third etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To add information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Furthermore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another reason/ factor/ point is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To show a logical relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It follows then</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To draw a ‘conclusion’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This implies/suggests/ indicates/ shows/ establishes/ demonstrates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To clarify a previously stated idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To put this another way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put succinctly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To introduce a ‘contrasting’ or ‘qualifying’ idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In/by contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>However</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To provide an ‘example’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . including</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When drawing on other scholars’ writings*

The verbs you choose in reporting other scholars’ findings tend to convey to your reader your attitude towards other scholars’ research:

**Words that tend to convey a more neutral attitude on your part**, though how neutral your attitude is depends on the commentary that follows in your text:
- X points out/ argues/ suggests/ indicates/ shows/ maintains/ comments /remarks/ reports/ recommends/ claims

**Words that tend to convey some degree of uncertainty on your part, perhaps because you want to challenge the author’s ideas:**
- X alleges/ declares/ speculates/ postulates/ contends/ asserts

**Words that tend to imply your agreement:**
- X establishes/ affirms/ confirms/ proves/ convinces/ demonstrates

Of course you might use other words too:
- X recommends/ refutes/ discards/ stresses/ advocates/ describes/ proposes/ urges declares/ contradicts/ challenges/ etc.

Your choice will always depend on why you are using that particular source, what use you want to make of that source in developing your own discussion. The double-edged question then is: What value do you attribute to the source materials on which you are drawing, and what use do you want to make of them in your discussion.

**WRITING A CONCLUSION**

You might want to consider the image of an essay set out in Figure 9 as you approach the writing of your conclusion:

**Figure 9: The funnel image of an essay**

Your conclusion should reflect on what you have established in your discussion without simply repeating your point of view. It should give the essay a sense of completeness by bringing the discussion to some resolution, reacquainting your reader with the central themes and referring back to your overall point of view on the topic set.

The conclusion is your last word on the topic, and potentially it has great impact:
- Finish off in your own words rather than with a long quotation (do you really want your response to be ended by someone else’s words?).
- Reacquaint your reader with the whole essay (don’t limit your conclusion to one or two points and not the whole essay), but be selective in doing so.
- Identify what you have found in relation to the question
Acquaint your reader with what you conclude (what do your findings mean and what is significant about them?).

Acquaint your reader with the implications of your conclusion/s? This does not mean adding something new to your argument, but using your argument to say something (maybe tentatively) about the wider context (field) of the topic.

In this way your essay conveys to your reader... “You gave me an issue/problem/question to consider... here is my response to that issue/problem/question and my response is significant etc. because...” (Although you would not word it this way of course!)

Below is an example of a conclusion from a graduate student essay that draws together the significant findings in the body of the essay, says what these findings actually mean, and points the way forward.

**Conclusion**

*This paper has shown* that arms control, whether bilateral or multilateral, is inevitably vulnerable to political intrusion. While the Catch-22 applies, formally negotiated arms control arrangements will be necessary to put in place a formal structure to hedge against times of downturn in political relationships. Given the political reality of inherent distrust between/among states, one can seek at best partial measures of disarmament, rather than complete disarmament. Even the, comprehensive elimination of specific classes of weapons is not possible or even desirable, particularly in the case of nuclear disarmament. Nevertheless, the arms control enterprise should continue to employ the hardware approach—qualitative as well as quantitative regulation on the level of armaments, the central objective being to reduce the risk of war. However, it should also switch to the software approach—the CBMs [Confidence Building Measures] which are especially lacking outside Europe—whenever the political climate allows a modicum of trust sufficient to start the process. The CBM process, once started, is likely to build on the process itself, leading to an enhanced security.

*As has been argued,* while there is still an unfinished nuclear superpower agenda, the proliferation issue is demanding the exigency of the arms control enterprise. However, it should be recognized that proliferation is unlikely to be halted [NOTE: the more tentative language] comprehensively; seepage will always occur. What the arms control enterprise can do is to act as a brake in slowing down the proliferation. However, for arms control to act as a more effective brake, there is a need for some effective leadership, just like in most other international regimes—an issue that has not been addressed in this paper [NOTE: speculating outside the argument of the paper].

The end of the Cold War has placed the US in an absolute position to provide leadership in the security arena. US leadership is particularly useful in international arms transfer control regimes. [Note this implication] However, should the US be seen to behave contrary to the spirit of the arms control enterprise (such as deploying or testing new weapons systems or even transferring arms as it did to Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the Gulf War), this will seriously erode the credibility of the arms control enterprise. In this respect, a reappraisal of US arms control policies should be the first forward step in building a more successful arms control enterprise. The US will need to muster sufficient political will to provide the necessary world political leadership and reaffirm its commitment to the arms control objective of building a more secure world—a world where the use of force becomes truly the last resort.
Why reference?

Academic work involves the fundamental process of critically engaging with the work of others. For most assessment tasks, you will be required to work with different sources. Aside from searching for sources, the early part of the research process will involve evaluating sources, assessing their relevance, testing their reliability, looking for similarities or differences between sources, making connections, and so on. Following this stage, you will then "move into the most significant part of research writing: forging relationships for your own purpose", that is, developing some new and original understanding based on the connections that you make between diverse sources. Without references, it would be impossible to determine how original your work is.

When to reference

When writing an academic essay or a report, you will invariably draw upon the research of others, directly or indirectly, and incorporate it into your own work. For example, you may choose to quote an author, paraphrase a section of an author's work, or simply use an idea or information from a text. In producing an essay, you need to reference whenever you

- QUOTE directly from another writer;
- PARAPHRASE or SUMMARISE a passage from another writer;
- USE material (e.g., an idea, facts, statistics) directly based on another writer's work.

It is your responsibility to "identify and acknowledge your source in a systematic style of referencing." By doing this, you are acknowledging that you are part of the academic community. It is important to do this so that your reader, the person assessing your work, can "trace the source of your material easily and accurately." The reader wants to know where your evidence or support for your argument(s) comes from.

Using the work of others, so long as it is acknowledged, is an accepted practice in academia. The failure to appropriately acknowledge source materials could result in an accusation of plagiarism. The ANU Code of Practice for Student Academic Honesty defines plagiarism as "copying, paraphrasing or summarising, without appropriate acknowledgement, the words, ideas, scholarship and intellectual property of another person." The charge of plagiarism could in turn lead to failure for the assignment, failure for the whole course, or, in dire cases, suspension or termination of your program or study. If you commit careless and/or deliberate breaches of academic honesty, it will be recorded on your student file.

Referencing systems

In general, there are two main styles for acknowledging source materials: notes (footnotes, endnotes) and internal citations (commonly known as the Harvard system). Usually, your faculty, discipline, or school will indicate which referencing system they prefer; often this is stated in the course/program handout or on a relevant website.

NOTES: FOOTNOTES AND ENDNOTES

When using footnotes or endnotes to acknowledge the sources you have used and referred to in an assignment, refer to a relevant style guide for information on when to use, where to place, and how to format them.

In addition to providing information about the source, a note may be used to add supplementary content (e.g., extra information, a definition) or bibliographic evaluative comments. Usually, though, supplementary comments are best avoided as they distract the reader from the body of the written assignment.

When: A footnote or endnote is used whenever you use a source, either directly as a quotation or indirectly as a summary or paraphrase, to support and develop your argument. Footnotes and endnotes are very similar

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14 Clanchy and Ballard, Essay Writing for Students, 140.
15 Clanchy and Ballard, Essay Writing for Students, 140.
in that they provide the same bibliographical information about a source, although appearing in different places. Footnote or endnote numbers will run consecutively, starting from 1.

Where: Using a word processor, insert a footnote or endnote in your text at the end of a sentence or immediately following a direct quotation or a point taken from a source. The note, which will appear as a superscript number, is placed directly after the quotation or paraphrased material, with the footnote itself appearing after the punctuation.

How: first citation—full bibliographical information: Whenever you first create a note for a source of information, you must provide full bibliographical details. As to the type of bibliographical information required and its format, you will need to consult a style guide relevant to your discipline. Law students, for example, may refer to the Australian Guide to Legal Citation. Humanities students may refer to the Modern Language Association style guide, the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Students enrolled in the Social Sciences may consult The Chicago Manual of Style.

To appreciate the differences in note format, consider how two different style guides format a reference to a book:

Australian Guide to Legal Citation:

Author, Title (Edition Number, Publication Year) Pinpoint/Page.


MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers and The Chicago Manual of Style:

Author, Title (Place of Publication: Publisher, Publication Year) Page.


These systems format journal articles in a different way as well. Before you begin to use notes, find out from your lecturer or tutor what style they require or prefer. In Law, there will be an expectation that you use their style guide.

How: second citation—shortened information: If you refer to a source more than once in your essay, there is no need for the second citation to repeat the full details of the source. Style guides recommend that "subsequent citations to sources already given in full should be shortened whenever possible."17 Second and subsequent references to a source, although much shorter, will still contain enough information so that the reader can readily identify the source.

SUBSEQUENT CITATIONS

The Chicago Manual of Style

When making a subsequent reference to a source, state the author’s surname, the main title, and the appropriate page number(s). If the title is lengthy, it is permissible to shorten it (see examples 5–7).


**MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers**

When making a subsequent reference to a source, state the author’s surname and the page number(s). However, if you use more than one work by an author, then you will need to cite a shortened version of the title [see examples 5-6].


**Footnotes in action: example**

When using footnotes you need to know when to use them, where to place them, and how to format them. Look at this example by Adam Shoemaker to see how an academic incorporates and acknowledges appropriately his source material. In the extract, Shoemaker alludes to the literature (e.g., footnotes 23 and 27) and incorporates direct quotations into the text (e.g., footnotes 24, 25, 26, and 28). When quoting directly from his original sources, Shoemaker does not rely on using lengthy, excessive quotations. Rather, to develop his idea that Black Australians have been critical of Sally Morgan’s *My Place*, he quotes selectively from novelist and critic Mudrooroo, choosing critical phrases that he then incorporates into his own sentence (e.g., “publishing ploy” and “battler genre”). He also chooses a relatively short, but evocative quotation. In the case of another critic, Jackie Huggins, he uses ellipses to condense the quotation so that it is relevant to his purpose.

As a number of commentators have observed, the narrative of *My Place* has a generic relationship with certain other Australian texts such as A.B. Facey’s *A Fortunate Life* (1981) which, significantly, has sold at least as well (over 550,000 copies) and was produced by the same editor, B.R. Coffey, and publisher, the Fremantle Arts Centre Press. The conjunction, timing and popular success of these two books is an intriguing one, and speaks volumes about the burgeoning popular interest in the ‘life story’ genre in the Australia of the 1980s and 1990s.

Having said that, it is undeniable that, unlike *A Fortunate Life*, *My Place* is a work which divides critics, academics and Aboriginal commentators alike. While it is lauded on the one hand as being, in Judith Brett’s memorable phrase in Australian Book Review, ‘a gift to the reader’, commentators such as Mudrooroo have been very harsh in their criticisms of the book. In his 1990 study, *Writing from the Fringe*, he dismissed it as a ‘publishing ploy’ in the ‘battler genre’ and derided it scathingly in these now infamous words: ‘Sally Morgan’s book is a milepost in Aboriginal literature in that it marks a stage when it is considered O.K. to be Aboriginal as long as you are young, gifted and not very black.’

Significantly, this sentence disappears in the totally-revised version of *Writing from the Fringe* which was released in mid-1997 under the title *The Indigenous Literature of Australia*, although Mudrooroo still carries the weight of that earlier denunciation. For Mudrooroo’s acerbic personal criticism of Morgan was undoubtedly one of the factors which led, ultimately, to his own denunciation by members of the Nyoongah community of Western Australia in July 1996.

However, Mudrooroo is not alone in his criticisms of Morgan’s work, nor is he the only Black Australian author to take aim at her construction (by the book-reading public as much as by the media) as the archetypal indigenous writer. For one, the prominent Murri researcher and author, Jackie Huggins, expresses her reservations about the ease with which indigenous identity is both discovered and explicated in Morgan’s book; as she puts it, “Precisely what irks me about *My Place* is its proposition that Aboriginality can be understood by all non-Aboriginals... To me that is *My Place’s* greatest weakness.”

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literature which is purchased; if, in this sense, it becomes 'Aboriginal literature' for the international reader.

23 See, for example, Stephen Muecke, 'Aboriginal Literature and the Repressive Hypothesis', *Southerly*, 48 (1998), 405-18.

24 Quoted on the back cover of all current Australian editions *My Place*, published by the Fremantle Arts Centre Press.


26 Mudrooroo, 149.

27 For details of this affair, see Victoria Laurie, 'Identity Crisis' in *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 20 July 1996, 28–32, and subsequent articles in the *West Australian*, such as 'Family Adds Fuel to Literary Fire', *West Australian*, 27 July 1996, 15. Significantly, Mudrooroo refuses to acknowledge the validity of these arguments and continues to identify as an Aboriginal writer (see, for example, the back cover of his *The Indigenous Literature of Australia*, South Melbourne: Hyland House, 1997).


**Internal Citations: Harvard, in-text, author-date**

When using internal citations to acknowledge the sources you have used and referred to in an assignment, refer to a relevant style guide for information on when to use, where to place, and how to format them. In this section, *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2003) is used.

**When:** An internal citation is used whenever you use a source, either directly as a quotation or indirectly as a summary or paraphrase, to support and develop your argument. As stated in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (1994), "Whether paraphrasing or quoting an author directly, you must credit the source" (97).

**Where:** When referring to a source in the text, place the internal citation directly after it:

Brown (2005) argues that Victorian-based football teams have an advantage over non-Victorian teams because their 'away' games often do not involve long-distance travel.

If making a generalisation based on your research, you can refer to more than one source in the internal citation; this can increase the apparent strength of the claims you make. In the Chicago style, sources can be listed according to publication date or alphabetically:

- Waste disposal is Australia's most important environmental issue (Talbot 1990; Clarke 1991; Piggot 1993).

- Recent studies indicate that postgraduate students have a strong understanding of appropriate referencing practice (Aiken and West 2004; Chang 2001, 2005; Schmitt 2001).

If using various sources in the same sentence, place the internal citations in a relevant spot:

- Potential economic impacts arising from proposed legislative changes (Lindemayer 2002), housing costs (Bartlett 2005) and projected population increases (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) are likely to be negative.

If using a direct quotation, the reference usually follows it, but it may also precede it:

- According to Hicks (2007, 144), new technologies "make it more than likely that uprisings and revolutions will be televised."

- New technologies, according to Hicks, "make it more than likely that uprisings and revolutions will be televised" (2007, 144).

- New technologies “make it more than likely that uprisings and revolutions will be televised” (Hicks 2007, 144).
**How:** In this style of referencing, which is commonly used in science and the social sciences, all references are cited in the body of your text. The references are cited in parentheses and they contain minimal information, namely the author’s surname, the date of the source’s publication, and the relevant page number(s) referred to. These minimalist citations are a mechanism for directing the reader to the reference list.

Full bibliographic information is supplied separately in the reference list that appears at the end of the essay. “Author-date citations in the text must agree exactly, in both name and date, with the corresponding entries in the reference list, and there must be an entry for every text citation” (*The Chicago Manual of Style* 2003, 620). The reference list is organised alphabetically by author’s surname, followed by the date of publication.

**Internal citations in action: example**

When using internal citations you need to know when to use them, where to place them, and how to format them. In this example, Emma Baulch (2002, pp.220-221) develops her critique by making generalisations based on the literature and incorporating direct quotations into the text. When quoting directly from her original sources, Baulch does not use lengthy, excessive quotations. Rather, she quotes selectively from the literature.

It is currently standard among scholars of identity politics to view the global order not as series of centres and peripheries responsible for mediating the imposition of a Western cultural imperialism on their citizens, but as a chaos: random, disjunctive, disorganised and fragmented. Globalisation, that is, has entailed not a one-way process of homogenisation, but simultaneous unification and diversification (Tomlinson 1991; Appadurai 1996; Gilroy 1997).

In the early 1980s, when the ‘full deployment of satellite transmission created the possibility of the simultaneous broadcast of performances on a worldwide scale’ (Garofalo 1991: 327), scholars of pop and rock music (Mitchell 1996; Garofalo 1991; Frith 1991; Laing 1986; Shuker 1995) began to emerge as prominent critics of the cultural imperialism thesis. Many have argued that globalisation of the music industry has followed a post-imperial model. For example, recalling Appadurai’s (1996: 31) assertion that ‘as (electronic) media link audiences and performers across national boundaries, we find a growing number of diasporic public spheres: the crucibles of a post-national order’, Frith (1991: 267-268) maintains that multinational recording labels no longer ‘share supranational identity . . . to be imposed culturally around the globe’.

The issue of audience reception is also important in critiques of the cultural imperialism thesis, and the notion of hybridity is premised on the idea that compliance and passivity rarely characterise consumption of media texts. Proponents of hybridisation argue that the cultural imperialism theorists’ fears of homogenisation or ‘cultural grey out’ (Mitchell 1996: 50) is unrealistically purist, for it sets an imagined (Third World) indigeneity against the West, perceived as essentially inauthentic.

**References**


The quality of your writing can influence the way in which your lecturer or tutor will respond to your work. If you have done quality research, you don’t want to spoil things with poor quality writing. We all have our particular problems with spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, word usage or overall style. A handout cannot really accommodate all of our individual grammatical and stylistic deficiencies. But here are some things to consider.

1. Have a style guide. I have a copy of H. Ramsey Fowler and Jane E. Aaron, The Little, Brown Handbook, 8th ed. (New York: Longman, 2001) next to my computer. It contains much information on articles, nouns, verbs (tense, agreement), commas, semicolons, introductory phrases, and so on. Another source I refer to is David Lovell, Macquarie Student Writer’s Friend (Sydney: Macquarie Library, 2001). The reference manual The Chicago Manual of Style 15th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) has an excellent section on punctuation, which covers such things as commas, quotation marks, full stops, and hyphens. If you were writing in the health sciences or psychology, you would want to consult a style specific to health/medicine/science as, for example, the American Psychological Association’s Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: APA, 1994).

2. If you do have grammatical problems with your work, it is best to focus on dealing with one grammatical or stylistic issue at a time. If your marker indicates that you have grammatical problems, meet with them and ask them to identify and then prioritise which ones you need to address first. For example, if subject-verb agreement is a problem – “The boys plays together” or “The car backfire” – then consult a style guide and find out how to correct it. Some websites, for example, the Purdue University On-line Writing Lab at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/, provides downloadable handouts on grammatical issues and on-line grammatical exercises.

Presentation

- Always number your pages.
- Use a readable font size, e.g. 12 point type.
- Use space and a half or double spacing for your final draft.
- Check headings and sub-headings for spelling and consistency.
- Allow appropriate margins at sides, top and bottom of pages.
- Use spaces between paragraphs, or indented first line of paragraphs?
- Use the cover page provided by the Department; provide your name, lecturer, course, submission date, word limit (the truth!), and title of essay.

Academic writing style

Avoid using contractions like can’t, wouldn’t, it’s.

- Be judicious in your use of personal pronouns like I, me, my. Avoid using we, us, our, you, your because of the ambiguities this usage may cause.
- Use abbreviations such as e.g. i.e. only in parenthesis (i.e. brackets). Also, avoid such abbreviations as eighties—should be 1980s.
- Vary the language you use. Do not, for example, start every sentence with the same construction.
- If you are presenting a list (First, . . . Second, . . . Finally, . . .) make sure you have told the reader what it is you are listing.
- Use gender-neutral language. That is, avoid “man” and “mankind.”
- If you use acronyms, give in full first, acronym in brackets after, and use the acronym thereafter, e.g. United Kingdom (UK).
- When referring to a decade, do not use an apostrophe, e.g. 1980s, not 1980’s.
• Avoid colloquialisms or slang.
• Numbers 1-10 should be written as words. If you begin a sentence with a number, write the number rather than use a numeral.
• Avoid stating absolutes, e.g. a perfect example, a total failure, everybody believes. Be careful also with words like always, never, only.

Punctuation
• Check your use of common punctuation marks such as comma (,), colon (:), apostrophe (‘) and semicolon (;). Check out: ‘A basic guide to punctuation’, http://academicskills.anu.edu.au/
• Use italics for non-English words.
• Be consistent in your use of quote marks: double or single?

Spelling
• Use computer spell-checks, but proofread aloud, reading exactly what you have written (rather than what you think you have written) to identify common errors.
• Avoid US spelling: colour vs. color. Most computers have US spelling as default.
• Cross-check the spelling of authors’ names and discipline-specific terms.

Referencing
• Use an appropriate style for citations (in-text? Footnoting?) and bibliography/reference list.
• Indent and single-line space long quotes (no quotation marks are necessary).
• Give page numbers for all in-text direct quotations.
• Put quote marks around short, direct quotations.
• Use exact spelling, grammar and punctuation of direct quotations, as in the original.
• Review quotations for relevance. Are they integrated into the argument and the grammar of the text?
• Arrange the bibliography in alphabetical order, according to authors’ surnames.
• Give page numbers for articles and chapters in edited volumes listed in the bibliography.
• Check the reference list for accuracy—spelling, dates, titles translated into English if they are not in English, etc.

FURTHER RESOURCES
Boddington, Paula, and John Clanchy, Reading for Study and Research (South Melbourne: Longman, 1999).
Rao, Valli, Kate Chanock, and Lakshmi Krishnan, A visual guide to essay writing: how to develop & communicate argument (Sydney: Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL), 2007).